MOTION FOR ADJOURNMENT OF THE DEBATE.

MR. K. P. NILAKANTA PILLAI (*Chirayinkil*): Sir, I move for the adjournment of the business of the House.

PRESIDENT: I have just received a notice from the member for Chirayinkil in which he begs leave to move the adjournment of the business of the House for the purpose of discussing a definite matter of urgent public importance, namely, the proposal for the assignment of a very large extent of *puduval* land in favour of a foreign company—in favour of a certain European company—or to make it more clear—in favour of an English company. Mr. Nilakanta Pillai goes on to say:

"The assignment of such a large extent as one or two hundred and fifty thousand acres of land to a foreign European company will be the alienation of the permanent resources of the State which would vitally affect the interests of the country which is now confronted with the serious problems of increasing population and growing unemployment. The report has caused great consternation in the minds of the public. The Government are taking confidential steps in the matter and are carrying on secret negotiations with the company. Unless the whole matter is discussed and the public view expressed on the matter, the Government would push up the matter with considerable speed so as to reach a stage when it would be impossible for us to make them retrace. There has been a report of the proposal of the assignment of these *puduval* lands to the foreign company a little before Mr. Watts, the Dewan, proceeded to England on leave. The report created so much agitation in the land that Mr. Watts himself thought it fit to contradict. After going to England, Mr. Watts seems to have interviewed the authorities of the company and the present proposal seems to be the result of that conversation. The object of this urgent motion is to elicit information on these matters so that the apprehension current among the public may be removed."

On this account, he has brought forward this motion to elicit information on these matters so that the apprehensions current among the public may be removed.

To begin with, I may say the provision in the Legislative Council Rules for a motion for the adjournment of the business of the House is hardly the means for seeking information. Interpellation is the means for obtaining information. However, we will waive that aside. We are not going to take our stand behind small technicalities. I am perfectly willing to give all the information available not merely to Mr. Nilakanta Pillai but to everybody else in this House and even to a much larger circle outside. There are no secret negotiations or confidential attempts on the part of any of those directly concerned in the administration, those upon whom responsibility rests. Furthermore, I may say the matter has gone before the Economic Development Board and they have pronounced an opinion upon it. And even before the matter went up to the Economic Development Board, I enlisted the confidential advice of several experienced, responsible and sober-minded gentlemen of this Council on certain proposals which I am going to explain to you. By way of preface, I may say that a certain gentleman of Travancore, working, I understand, in partnership with an Indian capitalist, approached the Government with a request for the outright sale of about one hundred thousand acres of land to a certain English firm. This, of course, was a proposition which I declined to entertain, and as long ago as the 20th May 1926, the Chief Secretary wrote in reply to that request as follows:—

" * * *

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"In reply, I am directed to say the Government regret that they are, as at present advised, unable to assent to a monopoly concession in the form proposed. They will, however, be prepared to entertain applications under the Waste Land Rules for the registry of specified and well-defined areas. Such areas will have to be surveyed, and in the case of wooded lands, the value and utility of the timber will have to be examined.

"Furthermore, the availabilty of the tract in question has not as yet been given sufficient publicity to enable a decision as to a suitable price based on demand."

The area in question, if you will look at the map, is a blank space marked as unexplored country. If you go to Peermade and travel the whole length of the Periyar Lake, for about 8 or 10 miles, you will eventually reach a place called Salt Lick Creek. From there, you will have to walk many miles before you get to a place where you can pitch your camp for the night. If you get up the next morning and walk a number of miles along the hills, you will come to the Pambayar river. The whole region is absolutely devoid of roads or paths except such as have been made by elephants or sambur. If you walk over these tracts, you will have to pass through dense bamboo forests, miles of good timber forests at other places, and through regions overgrown with long grass shoulder-high. This is the nature of the land in question. Whether it is fit for tea or other cultivation, I do not know. All that has to be ascertained.

Shortly after the Chief Secretary's letter of refusal referred to, I was called away to England on urgent private business; and while there, the Chairman of the Board of Directors of a certain very big company interested both in the production and distribution of tea approached me with a request to see me. He raised the question of the possibility of their company acquiring land in Travancore for the cultivation of tea. I told him, plain and straight, that I would not allow them to have a large tract of land here unless arrangements could be made for the people of Travancore to participate in the concern and to have an interest in such lands so that whatever profits are derived might be shared by the people of Travancore also. Upon this, he asked me whether he might prepare a scheme on the lines I indicated. I gave him permission to do so; and on the 15th July 1926, he wrote me a letter which I received here in August. In that letter he says:—

"We have given careful consideration to your suggestion that we should try to develop a plan whereby small owners within the State of Travancore may share in the advantages of tea production on a large scale.

"Such a scheme is quite contrary to the policy of the ordinary producing companies who only spend capital on their own interests.

"Our company, however, are not only producers, but are largely interested in the distribution and the sale of tea in India and will rather welcome the idea on the ground that it will lead to the opening up of suitable areas, stimulate interest in the tea industry in Travancore, and possibly lead to an increased use of tea within the State.

"We have approached the question, in the first place, by outlining what we consider would be the most advantageous arrangement possible from the point of view of the small owner, and have given effect to the suggestions you made."

That is the brief outline of their general proposals. To give you a little more detail, the idea is to divide up such tea lands as are made available into thousand-acre units of which a certain percentage will be utilised to support a factory for each unit. I will read out to you from a

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[President.]

note which I gave to the President of the Economic Development Board on this point.

"* * * It should be unnecessary to explain to experienced and business-like members that the greater the quantity of raw material produced, handled and converted, the smaller the cost of production per unit of manufactured article ; that is to say, if the cost of preparing the output of 600 acres of tea is x, the cost of converting the output of 400 acres will, when taken in relation to factory charges, be enhanced to x plus one-third. * *"

Therefore, it is necessary to have some considerable number of acres and a guaranteed production to keep the overhead charges and the cost of production low. Otherwise, the price per pound of tea will go up to such an extent as to put it outside the limits of competitive trade.

The idea is this. In each thousand-acre unit, the company will own say 600 acres and the remaining 400 acres will be split up into small bits of such areas as may be fixed hereafter and each such small bit will be made available for small holders of our country. The company will have a factory in their 600 acres, big enough to manufacture the tea grown on the 1,000 acres. The smaller owners will be supplied with tea seed. They will also have the benefit of the experience of the company during preparatory cultivation, and, until the lands begin to yield tea, the company will help the small holder with money. When the time comes for gathering the leaf, the company will undertake to manufacture tea for the small holder, and after manufacture, the holder may take the tea himself and sell it wherever he likes, or the company will purchase it from him or will send it to England on his behalf, to be sold there in auction. These are all details to be settled hereafter.

That is the sum and substance of what I have to say. First of all, we have to find lands as we do not know whether the lands which are available are fit for tea cultivation. Therefore, I propose sending out a survey party to go and investigate this Pambayar water-shed area, and to see whether those lands are suitable as tea lands. We have to await the result of the survey party's investigation and till then we do not know what we have to trade and are not in a position to say 'yes' or 'no' to the company or even to tell them that we are ready to negotiate.

I may tell you that the Economic Development Board, before whom this scheme was put, passed a resolution to the following effect. It was moved by Khan Sahib M. K. Khadir Pillai and seconded by Mr. C. P. Tarakan.

"Resolved that the Board is satisfied with the necessity of encouraging tea cultivation by small holders and approves tentatively of the general principles of the scheme put forward by Messrs. ————. The Board, however, considers it necessary that fuller details of the scheme should be discussed and fixed up at a special meeting for which a few Travancoreans with practical experience in tea industry should be co-opted as members. The consideration of this scheme should not, however, stand in the way of registering lands for tea cultivation to *bona fide* Travancoreans. Carried by a majority, Dr. Madhavan Pillai alone voting against on the ground that Travancore lands should not be registered in the names of foreigners".

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In regard to Dr. Madhavan Pillai's objection that land should not be registered in the name of foreigners, I can assure him that there is no proposal to register lands to foreigners. Happily, Travancore was grafted on to the British Empire some hundred years and more ago and the same political tree cannot produce two varieties of political citizenship. People of Travancore are members of the British Empire the world over and are fellow-citizens thus with other members of the British Empire. Therefore, those fellow-citizens from overseas should not be excluded from sharing in the rights of citizenship in Travancore any more than Travancoreans should be excluded from sharing in the rights of citizenship all over the British Empire. So British subjects are not foreigners in Travancore in the sense Dr. Madhavan Pillai contemplates. It is an English company that has made these overtures to Travancore.

Another objection, I believe, has been raised that Travancore does not want outside capital. To any such objector I would say—study the economic history of pre-war Germany or of the Argentine or of Mexico and many another country and see what can be done with outside capital. If people from outside are willing to invest their money in the State for its development, Travancore should regard it as a very high compliment, as an expression of trust, as a recognition of the good, safe and stable Government and fair-mindedness of this State and its people. As there is not sufficient capital in the country itself to develop its resources, it should welcome every pound sterling that finds its way into it.

These are my general observations. As regards the particular point raised by Mr. Nilakanta Pillai to-day, all that I can say is that the proposal is very much in the air at present. We have no sufficient data on which to pronounce an opinion, or even to proceed upon. Therefore, I say there is no public urgency or necessity to adjourn this House, and I trust that Mr. K. P. Nilakanta Pillai and those who think with him here will agree with me that I have afforded them as much information as they require. Since there is no urgency at all in the matter, I do not see the justification for invoking that provision of the rules which allows an adjournment of the business of the House for the discussion of a matter of urgent public importance. Consequently, I am unable to give permission to Mr. Nilakanta Pillai to make his motion.

MR. K. P. NILAKANTA PILLAI (*Chirayinkil*): For the time being, I am satisfied with the explanation.

PRESIDENT: Let me assure you, Mr. Nilakanta Pillai, that when the time comes—I am afraid, some months will have to pass—every possible information will be given to the public men of Travancore.

(Mr. G. Paramesvaran Pillai: *Hear, hear.*)

The Government of Travancore do not believe in a hole and corner policy. Equally they do not believe in conducting their negotiations from the house-top.

We will now proceed with the business of the day.

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